

Reflection for the 16th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Cycle C

The lectionary translation of the readings for this Sunday can be found at <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/072025.cfm>

1st Reading: *Gen 18:1-10a*

Our selection today is the well-known story of Abram being visited by three angels. The hospitality Abraham shows, in this story, was a requirement of ancient middle eastern cultural norms. God shows his approval of this custom by the blessing he gives to Abraham: That the promise of descendants, which God had given him earlier, will be fulfilled within a years' time.

2nd Reading: *Col 1:24-28*

The second reading takes up where we left off last week. The sufferings which Paul references are the sufferings of one who preached the Gospel in the ancient world. Paul is saying that his efforts and suffering are a joy to him because he is doing it all for the Lord, in the Church, his body. Notice that he also says it is the Lord's power working in him. In some ways it stands in contrast with Martha's attitude in today's Gospel selection.

Gospel: *Lk 10:38-42*

The Lord said to her in reply, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her." Lk 10:41-42

Setting & Parallels:

Jesus is still on his journey to Jerusalem. The disciples are with him. This comes after the teaching on the Greatest Commandment and The Parable of the Good Samaritan, both of which require that the Law be acted upon. Like the Parable of the Good Samaritan, this story is only told in the Gospel according to Luke.

Signal Words/Phrases:

burdened with much serving, tell her to help me, anxious and worried, one thing, better part

Verse by Verse:

Lk 10:38 "...Martha welcomed him." | Martha was taking care of the acts of hospitality which were required of Jewish people to be extended to visitors. (See the appended discussion of the Jewish requirement to extend hospitality.)

Lk 10:39 "...Mary sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him..." | Sitting at the Master's feet is a mark of discipleship. The NABRE footnote remarks:

Sat beside the Lord at his feet: it is remarkable for first-century Palestinian Judaism that a woman would assume the posture of a disciple at the master's feet (see also Lk 8:35; Acts 22:3), and it reveals a characteristic attitude of Jesus toward women in this gospel (see Lk 8:2-3).

As noted, the other gospels seem to portray society's attitude toward the proper place for women, but Luke's Gospel, here and in other places, seems to indicate that Jesus' attitude was different.

Lk 10:40 "...my sister has left me by myself to do the serving..." | Extending hospitality to strangers was considered a responsibility for Jewish people. Martha seems to view it as a burden. (See the appended discussion of the Jewish requirement to extend hospitality.)

Lk 10:41 "...you are anxious and worried about many things." | The Greek word translated as "anxious" means "in an uproar." Different manuscripts have slightly different renderings of this.

Lk 10:42a "There is need of only one thing..." | The UBS translation handbook, translates this "One thing is needed." The Anchor Yale Bible agrees with the UBS translation. Could it be taken to mean that one thing is missing from Martha's efforts?

Lk 10:42 "...Mary has chosen the better part..." | Jesus' response to Martha, in Greek, was that Mary has chosen the right "portion" as you would choose a portion of food at the table. Note that all portions together are necessary to make up the meal. Jesus was not devaluing the importance of hospitality over listening but was showing their proper places in relation to each other. They both are necessary.

What the 1st hearers heard:

My guess is that the first hearers were as confused by the conflict between the requirement to provide hospitality and the need to sit and listen to the Lord, as we are. They would have seen Mary's posture as symbolizing discipleship but may not have understood what was wrong with what Martha was doing. Hospitality is required tradition of Jewish people.

What would change if our community really heard this Gospel?

We would attempt to find a way to listen to the Lord.

What is the good news in this Gospel?

There is a better way to do life than what we are normally doing.

Gospel Reflection

The Listening Life and the Active Life

When I was a freshman in high school, I went to a Franciscan seminary... obviously, I didn't stay or I would be a Franciscan right now. While there, I learned a relatively long prayer form that begins with spiritual reading, either from the bible or a spiritual book. Something in the reading usually stands out and becomes the basis for a period of reflection on whatever that was that stood out to you. That reflection eventually opens into silent verbal prayer from the heart. Then that prayer is allowed to drift off into silent contemplation.

This can be a very fruitful prayer form and is an excellent way to sit at the feet of the Lord, like Mary, and listen to him. The problem is that most of us are not monks and don't have an hour and a half or so to set aside for one continuous prayer period. So, if we want to be like Mary, in today's Gospel selection, what do we do?

We can try Lectio Divina and/or Centering Prayer. They are the monastic prayer form I described broken down into two parts. Practicing one of them only takes half the time of the prayer form I described. I recommend them both if you have time. The problem is that they still take an amazing amount of time to fit into a day of working, raising children, tending to the needs of family and friends, etc. etc. So again, I ask, what do we do if we want to listen to the Lord like Mary.

I'm going to suggest that we use the Liturgy of the Word, at Mass, for our biblical and/or spiritual reflection. Instead of reading, we listen. We listen attentively to the readings and we listen to the homily. Oftentimes something will stand out and claim a space in our consciousness even though we may not know why our minds focused on it. It might be a word or phrase that is beginning our conversation with God.

If we were practicing Lectio Divina, we would stop there and spend some time reflecting on whatever claimed a spot in our consciousness. But we're not just practicing Lectio Divina, we are celebrating Mass, so we have to hang onto that thought and reflect on it later. Some people bring a notebook and write down the word or phrase that struck them. I highly recommend the practice of writing it down, otherwise it gets forgotten. You can use a notetaking app in your smartphone if you want.

After Mass, and during the week, we try to keep the word or phrase in the forefront of our mind as we go about our normal business. In that manner we allow our day-to-day life and the word or phrase to enter into conversation with each other. When we realize we've forgotten about it, we refer to our notes and bring the word or phrase back into our consciousness.

Eventually, something in our active day will draw a connection to that word or phrase and we'll begin to have an idea why the Holy Spirit presented it to us. Yes, I'm telling you that we can let go of all the other distractions in our active life and stay focused on our special word or phrase. And if we do, God will finish the conversation he began with us during the Liturgy of the Word at Mass. We will find God speaking to us through the normal activities of our day-to-day life.

When we "get it", as they say, it will feel like an insight which comes from out of the blue. It will be an aha moment when we realize what God is trying to say to us. After that, taking the time to sit down and reflect on our insight will be truly fruitful. It will change our life. That's what God is trying to do; change our lives for the better.

Voila, we have now combined the listening life of Mary, the disciple, with the active life of Martha, the doer. They are both in proper perspective with each other and speak to each other. In this manner, they fill out our relationship with the Master. It's like having Jesus walk with us moment by moment, day by day, teaching us as he did with his disciples. It is part of why the Mass should be the center of our life of discipleship.

God bless...

Personal Reflection:

The Lord said to her in reply, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her.” Lk 10:41-42

Question:

What words or phrases attracted your attention during the Liturgy of the Word on Sunday? What connection do those words or phrases have to your day-to-day life? (Why do you think they attracted your attention?) What might God be trying to say to you through these words or phrases? What response should you make? What action should you take?

Alternative:

What duties and anxieties fill up your life? How do they, or which of them, get in the way of your listening to the Lord? What would you need to do to make more room in your life for listening to the Lord as a disciple?

Something About Hospitality:

The following is taken from the Jewish Virtual Library:

<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/hospitality-in-judaism> last referenced July 18, 2022.

In [Judaism](#), showing hospitality (*hakhnasat orchim*) to guests is considered a [mitzvah](#). When one knows of strangers who are hungry or need a place to relax, it becomes a legal obligation. Some [rabbis](#) consider *hakhnasat orchim* (literally the “bringing in of strangers”) to be a part of *gemilut hasadim* (giving of loving kindness).

The first time hospitality is displayed in the [Torah](#) happens when [Abraham](#) invites the three wanderers from Mamre to relax while he brings them water and food ([Gen. 18:1-5](#)). Later, when Abraham sends his servant to find a wife for his son [Isaac](#), Rebecca graciously watered the traveler’s thirsty horses ([Gen. 24:28-32](#)). The Bible contains many examples of the importance of being hospitable toward strangers and the rewards that one receives for the act of kindness.

The Bible only praises one occasion of when hospitality was not offered to a stranger; this event occurred when Yael murders Sisera, the Canaanite general who escaped from the Israelites under Barak, and requested protection with Yael ([Judg. 4:18-24, 5:24-27](#)).

Also the [Talmud](#) teaches that one’s house should always be welcoming and open to strangers. In the Torah it affirms that Abraham always kept all four sides of his tent open, for guests to easily enter. The opening of one’s doors is why at the Seder on [Passover](#) an invitation is delivered to the hungry and needy. It is read in the Hagadah, “Whosoever is in need let him come and eat” (Ta’anit 20b). During the Middle Ages the custom arose of providing a guest house (*bet hakhnasat orehim*) for the poor; this would later be called *hekdesch* (“sanctuary”).

Conversely, an inconsiderate guest in a hospitable house is condemned. While hosts may not make guests feel awkward, guests are obligated to be grateful for the labors of the host. At meals, guests are also expected to recite an additional blessing in the course of [Birkat ha-Mazon](#) (Grace After Meals) for the host. Also a guest is obliged to leave some food on their plate (Er. 53b) and mind the desires of the host.

The meaning is that a guest should not impose on their host or extend their visit longer than three days. In *Midrash Tehillim* it states, “On the day a guest arrives, a calf is slaughtered in his honor; the next day, a sheep, the third day, a fowl, and on the fourth day, he is served just beans” (23:3).

Sources:Eisenberg, Ronald L. [*The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions*](#). PA: Jewish Publication Society, 2004.

Wigoder, Geoffrey , Ed. [*The New Standard Jewish Encyclopedia*](#). NY: Facts on File, 1992.

Telushkin, Joseph. [*Jewish Literacy: The Most Important Things to Know About the Jewish Religion, Its People and Its History*](#). NY: William Morrow and Co., 1991